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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PUSHES LIFTING OF AUSTRALIAN BAN ON US BEEF AND BEEF PRODUCT EXPORTS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On January 13, Ambassador McCallum spoke with Australian Minister of Agriculture, Tony Burke, to urge Australia to lift its ban on the import of US beef and beef products. Citing the need to remove this non-science based import ban, the Ambassador urged that removing this would eliminate a long-term irritant and be welcome news for the incoming Administration. Burke said that Australia is undertaking an Interdepartmental Review process of the ban and that the Cabinet will need to make the final decision. While this process could take anywhere from several weeks to several months, it is positive news that the government is reviewing their five-year old decision. END SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador spoke with Minister Burke and urged that with the recent release of Australia's review of its quarantine system (Beale Report), now is an opportune time for Australia to lift its ban on the import of US beef and beef products. He pointed out that the safety of trade of US beef and products is fully recognized by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and that the symbolism in lifting this import ban could be important in setting a positive tone for trade relations with the incoming administration.

¶3. (SBU) Burke acknowledged the US interest in seeking a favorable resolution to this issue and said that his Ministry is preparing its position in advance of an "Interdepartmental Review Process"; he expects a final recommendation in a week or so. Once that is complete, the full Cabinet review process will begin. Burke noted that this will take more than a matter of weeks.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: The fact that an internal review is underway is a positive sign that Australia may eliminate this restriction. Nonetheless, nothing should be taken for granted. For example, recently the government concluded its import risk analysis for imports of cooked chicken and apparently ignored the scientific comments provided by the United States and the European Union. As a result, US exports of cooked poultry will likely continue to be non-existent.

MCCALLUM